

Policy Brief on

Disability Inclusive Parliament



Being the ‘people’s house’ of the government, the role of the parliament is to reflect the needs and wants of all citizens while making laws and overseeing government activities. Persons with disabilities face difficulties to get their voices heard

in the Parliament. A disability inclusive Parliament will not only fulfill the constitutional commitment of ensuring political equality for all citizens, but it will also fulfill SDG’s promise of ‘no one leaves behind’.


7%

of the population
of Bangladesh
have disabilities^{1,2}


76%

cannot take part
in the whole
election process³


44%

find the voting
centers
inaccessible⁴

► Parliament promotes citizen’s rights by -

- having 300 elected MPs representing their constituencies and 50 selected MPs to ensure women’s representation in the Parliament.
- passing laws through examining draft bills and having debates and votes on the bills.
- parliamentary standing committee overseeing government activities.
- approving, monitoring, and auditing national budget.

► To make Parliament disability inclusive, we need to identify how -

- to encourage MPs increase advocating for rights of persons with disability and ensure representation of persons with disabilities in the Parliament.
- to ensure the laws reflect the needs and wants of persons with disabilities and are accessible to them after they have been passed.
- parliamentary standing committee can ensure disability inclusion in the government programs and spendings.
- to develop and implement a disability sensitive national budget.

Disability-inclusive Process, Policy and People

This policy brief highlights a number of best practices from around the world in ensuring disability-inclusive parliament. Some key examples are given on the overleaf. Based on a review of global policies and practices, some ideas and examples are highlighted here on how the processes, policies and people can promote a disability-inclusive parliament –

Communication

Having a communication strategy that addresses the followings might enhance accessibility of the persons with disabilities:

- **Accessible website** of the parliament.
- **Sign language interpretation** in the broadcast of parliamentary sessions.



The Parliament of Victoria (Australia) produces a regular news bulletin in Australian Sign Language to make parliamentary information more accessible.

Infrastructure

Following provisions of **Bangladesh National Building Code 2020** would help making disabled-friendly infrastructures:

- **Accessible entrance and parking area, step-free corridors, routes and sitting area** complying with the recommended dimensions.
- Floor and pavements with **firm, even, slip-resistant, and a stable surface having tactile ground** surface indicators.
- At least one **accessible toilet** in each floor or 5% of total toilets, whichever is bigger .
- Clear **signage** for easy navigation inside the building.

Disability Inclusive Process



All European Parliament buildings have at least one entrance that is accessible by wheelchair. The car parks in the Parliaments have spaces reserved for disabled drivers, and the cafeterias are equipped with tables and cash tills adjusted for people using a wheelchair. Working dogs are allowed onto the Parliament premises.

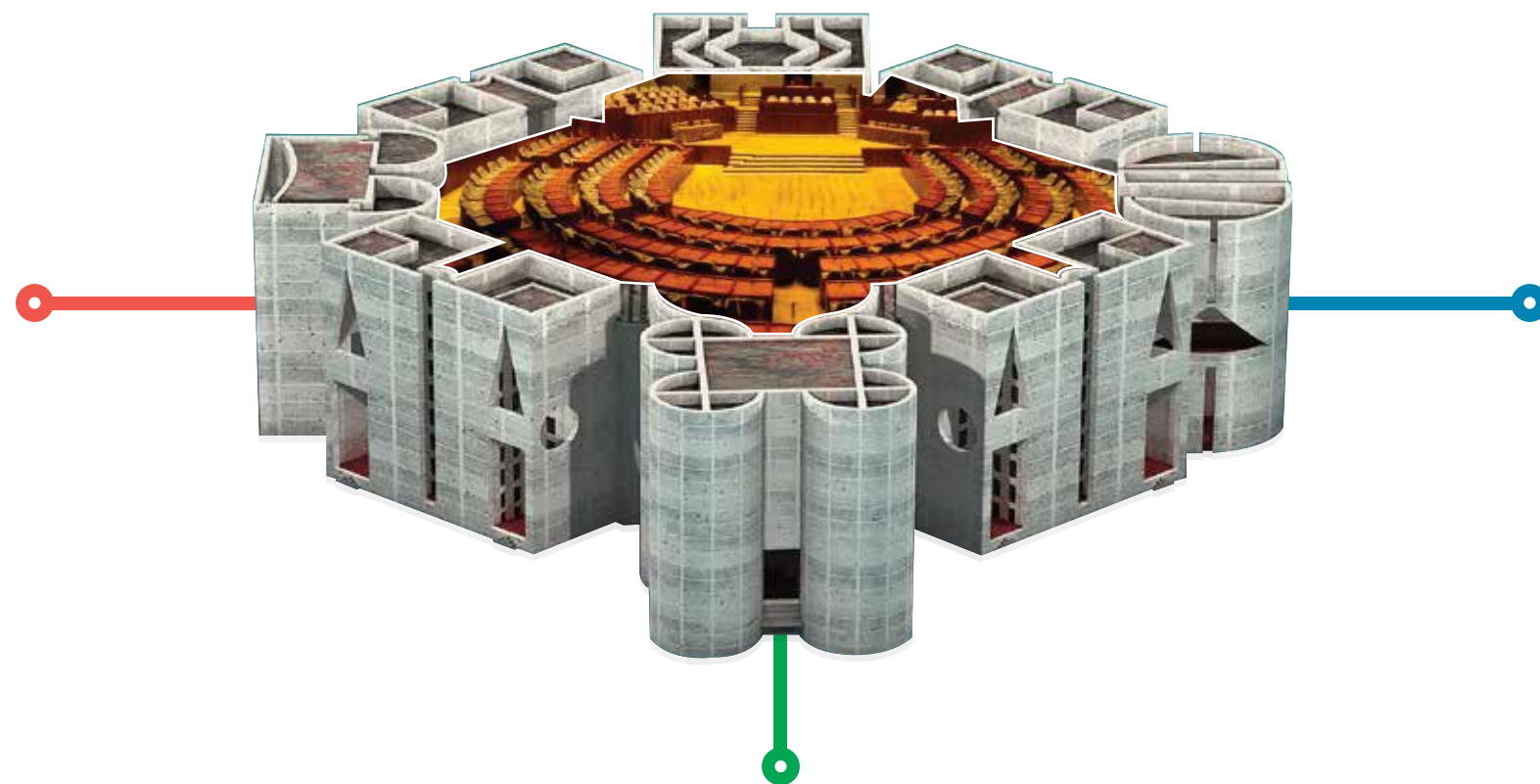
Sessions

Following are a few suggestions that might help making the parliamentary sessions accessible for MPs, visitors, and staff with disabilities:

- Audio induction loops.
- Sign language interpreters .
- Extra speaking time to MPs with special needs.



The Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Uganda provides the provision for the members with disabilities to cast their votes in the House during divisions, while other members must go to division lobbies. It also allows a member with disability to bring into the House crutches, equipment, or aids, even a person to give assistance to the member, if necessary.



Disability Inclusive Policy



Policies/bills

- **Consult with persons with disabilities and concerned organisations** when developing or revising policies and laws.
- An **accessible version** of different policies and bills concerning persons with disabilities can be prepared.



In Portugal, since 2004 the law has ensured participation by people with disability or representative organizations, particularly in the drafting of legislation on disability and the execution and evaluation of all policies, which ensure their involvement in all aspects of everyday life and society in general.



Budget

- Hold **pre-budget consultations** with persons with disabilities and relevant stakeholders.
- Mainstream disability in broader **budget advocacy**.
- Budget allocation and projects related to disability issues can be compiled as a **separate document** and prepare an **accessible version** of it (eg: Braille).



In Philippines, Persons with Disabilities Cluster, consisting 15 NGOs and DPOs, partnered with Alternative Budget Initiatives led by Social Watch Philippines, to conduct CRPD-compliant budget advocacy.



Disability Inclusive People



Members of Parliament

- In the 50 reserved seats for women, provision of women candidates with disabilities can be encouraged.
- Irrespective of gender, reserved seats for persons with disabilities can also be a step towards inclusion.
- Sensitising Parliamentarians on realities and challenges faced by persons with disabilities.



Laws in Uganda, Liberia, Rwanda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Philippines and Namibia set certain number of seats to be reserved for persons with disabilities to increase their representation in the Parliament.



Parliamentary staff

Having a focal or a group of trained **parliamentary staff** on disability would be helpful in providing assistance to staff and visitors with disabilities.



The Houses of the Oireachtas (The National Parliament of Ireland) has an Access Officer and a Disability Liaison Officer who can give assistance and guidance to people with disabilities in the parliamentary community and visitors.



Standing Committee

- The Standing Committee on Ministry of Social Welfare can have **special agenda focusing on disability rights**.



Canada's "The House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities" propose, promote, monitor and assesses initiatives that are aimed at the integration and equality of persons with disabilities in all sectors of Canadian society.



Future leaders

Following steps can be taken to encourage future politicians with disabilities:

- Build **leadership skills** of potential candidates with disabilities.
- Introduce **mentorship programs** for young leaders with disabilities under elected MPs.



Scottish Government funds several internship schemes.They include 3-month Disability Equality Internships in the Scottish Parliament, with placements in Human Resources, Facilities Management, and Committee Offices.

- If possible, providing **technical and financial support** to candidates with disabilities for creating a "level playing field" would help them in competing with the candidates without disability.



The UK government launched the pilot Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund in 2012 to provide money to disabled people seeking elected office with the aim of allowing them to compete on a "level playing field" with candidates without disability.

Reserve seats for persons with disabilities in parliaments around the world

Uganda

5 out of 529 seats are reserved for persons with disabilities⁵ in the Parliament of **Uganda** which are designated by special electoral colleges. Four of these MPs represent four regions of Uganda and a female MP with disabilities represents all women in the country.⁶

Egypt

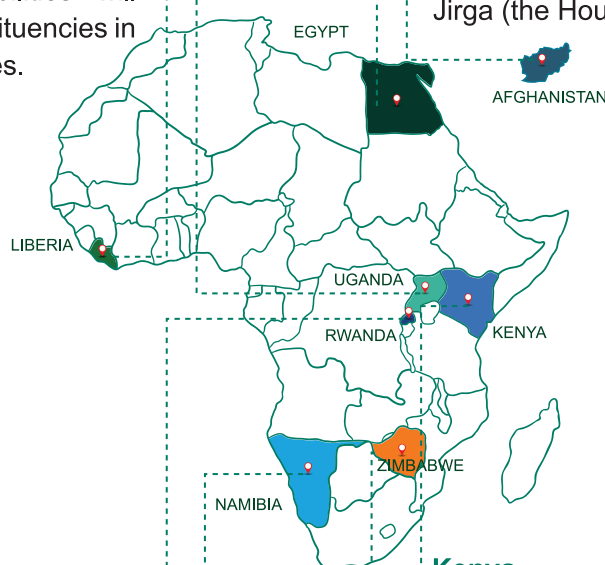
120 seats of **Egypt's** Majlis Al-Nuwab (House of Representatives) are contested through the electoral list system from country-wide four multi-seat constituencies. **Each party must include at least 3 or 1 candidate with disabilities in their list** depending on the size of the constituencies.¹⁰

Liberia

Liberia established seven 'Special Constituencies' for special groups of people.⁹ The Equal Representation and Participation Act of 2016 mandates that a person with disabilities will represent one of these constituencies in the House of Representatives.

Afghanistan

In **Afghanistan**, the president appoints **two persons with disabilities** along with 100 members for a five-year term in the Meshrano Jirga (the House of Elders).¹⁷



Rwanda

The Federation of the Association of the Disabled in Rwanda appoints one person with disabilities as a member of the Chamber of Deputies.⁷ This deputy is not tied down to any constituency, like most deputies of Rwanda.⁸

Kenya

Political parties in **Kenya** nominate 12 unelected seats to ensure representation of special interest groups, such as youth, persons with disabilities, and workers¹¹ **according to their proportion of members¹²** in the National assembly.

Namibia

In 2005, the first member with a disability was appointed in Namibia.¹³ The president of Namibia appoints unelected members based on their special expertise.¹⁴

Zimbabwe

In **Zimbabwe**, out of 80 members in the Senate, 1 male and 1 female with disabilities¹⁵ are **elected on separate ballots by an electoral college designated by the National Disability Board.¹⁶**

Global and national commitment for persons with disabilities



Rights to accessibility

Article 9 of CRPD requires States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure the access of persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

SDG Target 11.7 aims to provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible, green, and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Bangladesh National Building Code 2020 states all building shall have universal accessibility.

The Rights and Protection of Person's with Disability Act, 2013 protect rights of the persons with disabilities to accessibility into all premises (public and private including open space and buildings) and the ability to use public transport without restrictions, as well as unrestricted access

to opportunities and services, information, data, technology, and any form of communication.



Rights to political inclusion

Article 29 of CRPD¹⁸ requires States Parties to guarantee that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, by Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate.

SDG Target 10.2 emphasizes the social, economic, and political inclusion persons with disabilities.

The Rights and Protection of persons with Disability Act, 2013 clarifies the right of full and active participation of persons with disabilities in social, economic, and political spheres, along with the right to be registered as voters, the right to vote and the right to take part in elections.

Endnote

¹ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2019). Report on the Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2016. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Statistics and Informatics Division (SID), Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

² Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics(BBS). (2022). Preliminary Report of National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) 2019. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics(BBS).

^{3,4} National Grassroots and Disabilities Organisation (NGDO) National Council for Women with Disabilities (NCDW) Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST). (2015, August 1). Current status of Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh: Legal and Grassroots Perspectives, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust.

⁵ Constitution Of Uganda. (n.d.). International Labour Organisation.

⁶ Kett, M., Green, M., Hastings, J., & Enyogu, A. O. (2019). Situational Analysis of Persons with Disabilities in Uganda. Development Pathways.

⁷ Rwanda's Constitution of 2003 with Amendments through 2015. (2022, August 26). Constitute Project.

⁸ International Foundation For Electoral Systems. (2018, September 2). Elections: Rwanda Chamber of Deputies 2018. IFES Election Guide.

⁹ UN Women. (2016, October 3). Signaling a boost for gender equality, Liberia passes the 'Affirmative Action Bill'. UN Women.

¹⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union. (n.d.). IPU PARLINE database: EGYPT (Majlis Al-Nuwab), Electoral system. Inter-Parliamentary Union.

¹¹ The Constitution of Kenya. (n.d.). Kenya Law.

¹² The National Assembly Taskforce on Factsheets, Online Resources and Webcasting of Proceedings. (2017). The Role of Political Parties and Key Parliamentary Offices [Fact Sheet 33]. Parliament of Kenya.

¹³ Dentlinger, L. (2005). New faces in Parliament. The Namibian.

¹⁴ Namibian Constitution. (n.d.). Legal Assistance Centre.

¹⁵ The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20), (2013). Parliament of Zimbabwe.

¹⁶ Senate of Zimbabwe. (n.d.). Wikipedia.

¹⁷ Inter-parliamentary union. (2018, July 4). IPU PARLINE database: AFGHANISTAN (Meshrano Jirga), General information. Inter-Parliamentary Union.

¹⁸ CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. (2006, December 13). The United Nations.